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Regional confidence-building measures: activities of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

During the period under review, owing to logistical and other difficulties, the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa held only one ministerial meeting. At the conclusion of that meeting, the Advisory Committee adopted the Brazzaville Declaration on the situation between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda, by which it, inter alia, welcomed the decision of the two Governments to continue efforts aimed at reopening their respective embassies and encouraged them to complete that positive step. The Committee also endorsed the decision taken at the ministerial meeting of the Tripartite Commission of the Democratic Republic of the Congo-Rwanda-Uganda, held in Kigali on 24 and 25 August 2005, to give the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda an ultimatum to disarm voluntarily by September 2005. In addition to adopting the Brazzaville Declaration, the Committee took note with interest of the report submitted by the secretariat of the Economic Community of Central African States on its activities in the areas of peace, security and stability. It also adopted its programme of work for 2005-2006.

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Contents

		Paragraphs
I.	Introduction	1
II.	Meeting of the Standing Advisory Committee	4
III.	Action by the United Nations	9–13
IV.	Programme of activities for 2005-2006	14
V.	Administrative and financial matters	14–15
VI.	Conclusions and observations	16–18

	Page
	3
	3
	4
	5
	6
	6

I. Introduction

1. By its resolution 60/87, entitled "Regional confidence-building measures: activities of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa", the General Assembly, inter alia, reaffirmed its support for efforts aimed at promoting confidence-building measures at the regional and subregional levels in order to ease tensions and conflicts in Central Africa and to further sustainable peace, stability and development in the subregion. It also reaffirmed its support for the programme of work of the Advisory Committee adopted at the organizational meeting of the Committee, held in Yaoundé in July 1992 (see A/47/511).

2. By the same resolution, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to continue to provide the States members of the Advisory Committee with assistance to ensure that they are able to carry on their efforts. It also requested the Secretary-General and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to continue to provide their full assistance for the proper functioning of the Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa. In addition, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to continue to provide increased assistance to the countries of Central Africa for coping with the problems of refugees and displaced persons in their territories. Moreover, the Assembly called upon the Secretary-General to submit to the Assembly at its sixty-first session a report on the implementation of the resolution.

3. The present report is submitted in compliance with that request. It covers the activities undertaken by the United Nations and the Advisory Committee since the submission of the last report on the subject (A/60/166).

II. Meeting of the Standing Advisory Committee

4. The Advisory Committee held its 23rd ministerial meeting in Brazzaville from 29 August to 2 September 2005 (see A/60/393-S/2005/616). Its agenda included: (a) recent geopolitical and security developments in selected States members of the Committee, including Burundi, the Central African Republic, Chad and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the situation between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda; (b) exchange of experiences in the implementation of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes in various States members of the Committee; (c) review of the implementation of the Brazzaville Declaration on the Implementation in Central Africa of the Dar-es-Salaam Declaration on Peace, Security, Democracy and Development in the Great Lakes Region; and (d) status of the preparations for the Bahr-el-Ghazal joint military exercise which were scheduled to take place in November 2005.

5. All 11 States Members of the Advisory Committee, namely, Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Rwanda and Sao Tome and Principe, participated in the meeting.

6. The Advisory Committee welcomed the peaceful conduct of communal, legislative, senatorial and presidential elections in Burundi. While welcoming and warmly congratulating the people and leaders of the Central African Republic on the

maturity they had displayed through the peaceful conduct of the presidential elections, the Committee, nevertheless, expressed grave concern over the continued precarious security and humanitarian situation, notably in the northern areas of the country. The Committee welcomed the progress made in the implementation of the transition process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, bearing in mind the difficulties that had led to the extension of the transition period beyond June 2005. The Committee encouraged the Independent Electoral Commission to forge ahead with the preparation of the elections. It also welcomed the vigorous action taken by the armed forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to disarm the militias and improve security in the eastern part of the country.

7. Regarding the situation in Chad, the Advisory Committee welcomed the agreement of 21 August 2005, by which 600 combatants of the armed faction of the Mouvement pour la démocratie et la justice au Tchad (MDJT) realigned themselves with the Government. The Committee encouraged the Government to pursue its efforts towards reconciliation of all the citizens of Chad. With regard to the preparations for the Bahr-el-Ghazal joint military exercise, the Committee welcomed the offer by Angola and Cameroon to provide transport for troops from other countries as well as the offer from Cameroon and Gabon to provide Chad with air and ground logistics necessary for conducting the exercise. The Committee welcomed the confirmation by all member States during the meeting of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, held in Luanda on 13 and 14 April 2005, that they would be participating in the exercise.

8. At the conclusion of its meeting, the Advisory Committee adopted the Brazzaville Declaration on the situation between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda by which it, inter alia, welcomed the decision of the two Governments to continue efforts aimed at reopening their respective embassies and encouraged them to complete that positive step. The Committee also endorsed the decision taken at the ministerial meeting of the Tripartite Commission of the Democratic Republic of the Congo-Rwanda-Uganda, held in Kigali on 24 and 25 August 2005, to give the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR) an ultimatum to disarm voluntarily by September 2005.

III. Action by the United Nations

9. During the period under review, the Department for Disarmament Affairs continued to provide secretariat services to the Advisory Committee. In that regard, it assisted the Committee with the organization of its 23rd ministerial meeting and tried, to no avail, to raise funds to enable the Committee to implement its programme of activities for the period 2005-2006. In addition, the Department continued to encourage States members of the Committee to implement the 2001 Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. To that end, during the 2006 United Nations conference to review progress made in the implementation of the programme of action, the Department, in collaboration with the Small Arms and Demobilization Unit of the United Nations Development Programme and a number of donor countries, sponsored the participation in the conference of some of the most affected States members of the Committee.

10. Meanwhile, the Department for Political Affairs and UNHCHR continued to provide support to the United Nations Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy. The Centre, which is located in Yaoundé, commenced its work in March 2001. The core activities carried out by the Centre during the reporting period include: training, advisory services and technical cooperation, internship programme, human rights education and support to the peace processes.

11. Specifically, as a follow-up to the seminar for Pygmy communities held in Yaoundé and Sangmelima Mekas, Cameroon, in November 2002, on "Minorities and indigenous peoples' rights", the Centre, in collaboration with the OHCHR Anti-Discrimination Unit in Geneva, organized a seminar on the role of civil society in the implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, in Libreville in July 2005. The Centre also continued to provide technical cooperation to Governments and national institutions, upon request. Established national human rights institutions have already benefited from that assistance, for example, in Cameroon. Institutions in the process of being formally established, such as those in the Congo and Equatorial Guinea, were provided with modest support.

12. UNHCR also continued to provide assistance to the following States members of the Advisory Committee: Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon and Rwanda. During the reporting period, as a result of the conflict in Darfur, the Sudan, UNHCR expanded its operations in Chad and offered protection to some 750,000 refugees and asylum-seekers and assisted more than 470,000 persons in 2005 in the Central Africa and Great Lakes region. In addition, it facilitated the return of over 90,000 refugees to the countries in the region, while another estimated 25,000 persons returned of their own accord.[1]

IV. Programme of activities for 2005-2006

13. For its programme of activities for the period 2005-2006, the Advisory Committee envisaged the following activities: the convening of its 23rd and 24th ministerial meetings; the organization of a meeting of experts from States members of the Committee to discuss the issues of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration; small arms and light weapons; cross-border problems; security-sector reform; and the organization of a seminar on the involvement of civil society in the implementation of the Programme of Priority Activities on small arms, adopted in Brazzaville in 2003. However, owing to the difficulties faced in raising the necessary funds for its activities, during the reporting period, the Committee was able to convene only its 23rd ministerial meeting. The 24th ministerial meeting will be held in Kigali from 25 to 29 September 2006. The Department for Disarmament Affairs is still seeking sponsors for the convening of the meeting of experts and the seminar referred to above.

[1] See *UNHCR Global Report 2005*.

V. Administrative and financial matters

14. During the period under review, the General Assembly continued to provide funding from the regular budget for two ministerial meetings, while UNHCR continued to finance the activities of the United Nations Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa.

15. The Secretary-General reiterates his appeal to Member States, intergovernmental, governmental and non-governmental organizations to contribute to the Trust Fund of the Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa in order to enable the Advisory Committee to fully implement its programme of work.

VI. Conclusions and observations

16. **In recent years, financial support for the Advisory Committee's activities seems to be waning, resulting in its inability to fully implement its programme of work. Notwithstanding that situation, the Committee continues to play an important role in the promotion of peace and security in the Central African region. Sustained support to the Committee's activities, most of which is funded from voluntary contributions, is critical to ensure its ability to continue to discharge its mandate in the future.**

17. **States members of the Advisory Committee need to assume full ownership of the activities of the Committee. In that regard, it is critical that the Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa (established in June 2000) and its structures, in particular its early-warning mechanism, becomes operational. It is also vital that the capacity of the secretariat of the Economic Community of Central African States is strengthened so as to enable it to spearhead the implementation of the various declarations, decisions and recommendations of the Committee.**